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ABSTRACT

One format for the student written journal in an interpersonal communication theory course uses three components--classroom journals, reading journals, and listening journals--to develop students' skills as competent communicators. Student journals can provide a format for learned skills and awareness which may be applied creatively, critically, and analytically so that students leave the interpersonal communication class with both the practiced tools of competent communicators and further developed thinking skills. In these journals, students take ideas, concepts, quotes, and theories that have personal meaning to them, discuss these concepts, critically analyze the elements of interpersonal theory, and creatively apply these to their personal and professional experiences. The purpose of this format of journal writing is to provide the student with an arena and context for developing communication skills. (PRA)

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*The Student Journal:
Integration through Creative and Critical
Analysis*

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this paper is to present one format for the student written journal in an Interpersonal Communication theory course. A three component approach - Classroom Journals, Reading Journals, and Listening journals - is used to develop students' skills as competent communicators.

Competent communication begins with the communicator developing the skills necessary to perform successfully many specific communication acts (Fitzpatrick 73-84). The skills vary depending on the course. In Public Speaking, skills include audience analysis, research, organization, and the performance of impromptu, extemporaneous, manuscript or memorized speeches (Pearson 1991). In Voice and Articulation, skills include creating controlled exhalation, pharyngeal resonance, projection and the analysis and performance of specific phonemes in isolation and in context (Crannell 1991). In Interpersonal Communication, skills include conflict management, perception awareness, listening skills, small group interaction, gender and cross-cultural communication awareness and interviewing skills (Silvestri, 1991).

Once the basic skills are learned, the process of mastery (competent communication) is only begun. A knowledge of the skills (techniques) of communication does not make a competent communicator (Goss 1988). A competent communicator must not

only know a full repertoire of skills, but must also be able to analyze the communication context (both environmental and relational) to strategically choose the best skills for the given communication situation. Thus, it is not simply a base knowledge of the skills (performance/application of theory) which creates a competent communicator. A competent communicator must have developed the creative and critical analytical thinking skills to strategically choose the most appropriate skill for the situation.

The assumption of this paper is that student journals can provide a format for learned skills and awareness which may be applied creatively and critically and analytically so that students leave Interpersonal Communication with both the practiced tools of competent communicators and further developed thinking skills. It is not the assumption of this paper that this specific format is the only format acceptable to the creation of this goal. Many of my colleagues successfully use more structured, experimentally based journals to support their students in the integration of skills and theories. I have found that an additional dimension of growth- moral development as defined by Piaget, Kohlberg, Chickering , etc. - can be facilitated with the use of this format (Delworth 1980, Duska 1975). By reviewing Chickering's Vectors of Development, it is easy to see how the observation, introspection awareness and required objectivity of this format of journal helps the student progress from any development vector to the next level(s) (Delworth 1980,. p. 86-89).

One last introductory comment. It is an additional assumption of this paper that creativity cannot exist in a vacuum. One cannot "be" creative without a given format for self-expression. Thus the discussion of critical and creative analytical skills holds within it the assumption that the creativity exists as a function of the critical skills applied through self-expression. Critical thinking and analysis can exist by itself (Baron, 1987); creative thinking and analysis is dependent on an externally extant framework.

THE BASIC ASSIGNMENT

These journals have students take ideas, concepts, quotes and theories that have personal meaning to them, have them discuss these concepts, critically analyze the elements of interpersonal theory and creatively apply these to their personal and professional experiences. It is important to stress that students do not have to self-disclose in order to successfully complete the assignments. There are three types of journals used in this assignment.

The Class Journal:

The first component is the Class journal. Students choose one or two ideas discussed in class from one of the texts, by the professor, the student him or herself, or a fellow student. The theory or concept can be something the student agrees with, disagrees with, thinks is

brilliant, stupid, etc. These journals reflect students' thoughts on the class discussions and/or exercises.

There are several good behavioral objectives for this portion of the journal:

- (1) Students have a tendency to take notes when they know they need to write this type of journal - not copious notes, but sufficient notes to write the journal. This generally induces full waking consciousness in the classroom.
- (2) The students have to make a choice about which idea(s), theory(ies), concepts, etc. they will use for the journals, creating for the student a need to review each class discussion.
- (3) Once they have reviewed the concepts they must choose one or two to explore. It is in this exploration that students develop their critical and creative analytical skills.
- (4) In the writing of the journal, the student is forced to critically explore the concept and "to see if it fits."

Most students tend to discover some concept that is either totally new or applies to specific incidents in their lives. In writing the journal, the student is forced to creatively apply this theory to his/her new realities (perceptive or theoretical) or past histories.

Either way, the student has reviewed all theory presented in the classroom setting, explored each concept for validity, critically analyzed and creatively applied one or two to the student's perceptive

field, all in the writing of a one-two page paper done two or three times a week!.

Only one caution for adapting this assignment - Class journals should be graded on the quality of the analysis - not on agreement. This allows for and encourages healthy disagreement and some excellent feedback, including any major misconceptions that may have developed in a classroom environment which is often the home for heated debates!

The Reading Journal:

The second component is the Reading journal. For this assignment, the students choose two articles from assigned articles in our course reader, which for the last several years has been Bridges Not Walls by John Stewart. This journal is based on the reader rather than on the main text because the main textbook tends to cover a great deal of theory. I have also found Bridges Not Walls delightfully controversial.

For this component, the students must choose two articles from the number of assigned articles per week. They must demonstrate reflection and critical and creative thinking. They are assigned:

- (1) To think about the articles for a while.
- (2) To choose preferably one, if necessary two, concepts proposed in the article.
- (3) To share their position and thoughts on the topic(s).

Once again, after a period of reflection the students must creatively and critically analyze communication situations and apply them to perceptive reality.

The Listening Journal:

The third component is the Listening journal. The specific individual assignments for this component are more dependent on the text than the first two. Basically the purposes of the listening journals are:

- (1) To begin to have students notice their listening habits as habits (as opposed to nature).
- (2) To begin to have students explore the question of who is responsible in a communication situation (speaker and/ or receiver and what percentage 51-51, 50-50, or 100-100).
- (3) To have students keep a listening diary and record poor or excellent listening experiences and briefly describe what happened, internal and external distractions and level of satisfaction for the communication experience.
- (4) To have students begin to develop continuous and conscious awareness in all communication experiences (especially but not exclusively listening) with a deep seated appreciation of the value of awareness.
- (5) The way an aware ego can impact all listening experiences (Stone, 1989).

(6) To have students begin to develop the ability to desensitize their emotional listening triggers so that they are not at the mercy of senders.

The students submit the journals throughout the term. Class journals are submitted the subsequent class. Reading journals are submitted the subsequent class or week. Submission of Listening journals varies depending on the assignment (some are awareness assignments that require a week.)

SUMMARY

It is impossible to be all things to all people. I clearly remember a kindergarten teacher struggling and performing as a mediocre teacher as she attempted to teach under the "new K/1 system" which integrated both Kindergarten and First grade into the same classroom. She was an excellent teacher, but she was forced to use a teaching method which did not suit her natural teaching ability.

Educational movements over the last several years have advocated " 'Doing' across the curriculum" - which have included reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills. The integration of all skills into all classes as an ideal can be debated. What is especially appropriate in any course is to define the major behavioral and instructional objectives desired of the specific course and then to

attempt also to cultivate our students as lifelong learners through developing whatever thinking skills can organically be incorporated into the course given both the nature of the course and the nature of the instructor.

The purpose of this format of journal writing is to provide the student with an arena and context for developing communication competency in interpersonal communication skills. Other formats may also create the desired results. This paper is offered as a potential source of ideas for others interested in using the student journal for these purposes. Happy hunting!

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